The Eyes of El Greco

11 El Greco was a great painter. Born in 1541, El Greco
developed an unusual painting style. All the people in his paintings
are long and thin. This gives his paintings a strange beauty.

Was El Greco’s style a result of a problem with his eyesight?

People first suggested that El Greco’s style was nothing
more than a vision problem in 1913. Although healthy eyeballs are
round and shaped like basketballs, El Greco’s eyes were shaped like
footballs. The shape of El Greco’s eyes affected the way he saw
the world. Because of this, everything that he saw appeared to
be long and thin. This suggests that El Greco painted things the
way he actually saw them.

Many experts, though, reject this idea. They agree that El
Greco might have seen objects as long. But they believe he would
have known their actual shapes. He could have drawn them as they
really were if he wanted to.

To understand this argument, imagine that you are colorblind.
You see red as blue. Through your eyes, a ripe tomato appears blue. But
you know that tomatoes are really red. When you paint one, you use red
paint. In any case, art experts point out that, in many cases, El Greco
painted figures that looked normal. This suggests that El Greco used his
unique style because he liked the way it looked.

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